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25 February 1982

SUBJECT: Cuban Refugee Questions

25X1 Castro has stated--in public as well as in private--his willingness to discuss the return of "criminals" to Cuba, but has always insisted that any discussions be broader than just the "criminal" issue. He has intimated that Cuba's position on return of undesirables is "flexible." Although he has not made any recent statements on the subject, he is probably still willing to negotiate on this issue on the condition that other bilateral matters be discussed. He would look upon such talks as being useful in reducing Cuba-US tensions, but he would make no concessions on any of the major differences between Washington and Havana. *cut away*

25X1 Any attempt to return undesirables covertly to Cuba would--if detected in advance--be met with force by Cuba's military establishment. Havana would have a propaganda field day if there were, for example, confrontations on the high seas or incidents that resulted in loss of life. ILLEGIB

25X1 Although Castro said no one convicted of "blood crimes" had departed via Mariel, at least 700 "hardened criminals" did so. Many other "undesirables"--mentally ill, severely handicapped, and physically ill--also entered the US. A substantial proportion (about 30 percent) of the 125,000+ refugees admitted to having been convicted of crimes in Cuba. These offenses, however, were mostly minor--black marketeering, poor work attendance, attempting to leave Cuba illegally, or petty theft. A substantial number had been arrested merely on suspicion in a security crackdown during the period of the boatlift. 25X1

The many Cubans who requested permission to leave during the Mariel exodus but never got the chance to emigrate are gradually being reabsorbed into Cuban society. Professionals apparently are the first group being given an opportunity to reintegrate themselves by "volunteering" for duty. Contracts are drawn up that require 5 years of service, usually far from home, in return for "priority consideration" for emigration when the agreement expires. Ration cards, housing and educational benefits for children are taken away from the individuals originally registered for emigration. We continue to receive reports that in many cases these vital items have not been returned, and the would-be emigrants must depend on charity to survive. 25X1